



Mitchell Rolls

## BLACK SPICE FOR WHITE LIVES: A REVIEW ESSAY

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Joel Monture, writer and professor of traditional Native American arts, tells of a visit to Santa Fe, "the place to buy culture and reduce your spiritual deficit".<sup>1</sup> He writes poignantly of discovering two of his former students — a Lakota (Sioux) woman and her partner, an Arapaho sculpture student — making suede jackets — average price \$US 4,000 — in a dingy backroom under sweat shop conditions.<sup>2</sup> Disgusted and pained by the exploitation, by the counterfeit traditional garb and artefacts on sale and, more discreetly, the illegal sale of authentic heritage items, Monture concludes by noting that Native American popularity peaks in twenty-year cycles, and that during the troughs, a period when Native peoples become invisible, 'mainstream culture' redefines them in alignment with their changing interests.<sup>3</sup> He then notes that the dominant culture "will not stop short of acquiring even our spirituality for eventual mutation into a New Age pantomime".<sup>4</sup>

Aboriginal cultures too are experiencing this form of appropriation, and are also being redefined so as to suit contemporary non-Aboriginal interests, desires and needs. Not only is the material culture of Aborigines highly desired — for example, in 1994 a *Tjurunga* sold in New York for \$US50,000<sup>5</sup> — so too is their non-material cultural property. This is evidenced in a range of recent publications by Australian authors and critics, and in other commentary, in which Aborigines and their cultures are constructed in such ways that they offer solutions to, amongst other things, non-Indigenous alienation from the landscape, alienation from self, spiritual emptiness, social discord, cultural imperialism and environmental

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Monture, "Native Americans and the Appropriation of Cultures", *Ariel* 25.1 January (1994) 114-121.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 118-19.

<sup>3</sup> In *A Hundred Years' War*, a history of the Wiradjuri people of eastern-central New South Wales, Peter Read finds that since 1813 the administration of Aborigines has followed similar cycles. He detects thirty-year oscillations "between enthusiasm and disillusionment". Peter Read, *A Hundred Years' War* (Rushcutters Bay: ANU Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Monture, 121.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Anderson, "The Economics of Sacred Art: the Uses of a Secret Collection in the South Australian Museum", in *Politics of the Secret*, ed. Chris Anderson (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1995) 99.

degradation.<sup>6</sup> Much of the interest in Aboriginal cultural property (and Aboriginality), however, does not arise from the more parochial concerns of settler-Australians — such as how do we make Sally Morgan's *My Place* our place too — but from a general disenchantment with Western culture. Whatever supposed national crises are at the forefront of tracts detailing an author's reasons for fossicking through Aboriginal cultural property and identities, these are always set within the broader context of the decadence, failings and problems detected in Western society. This wider issue becomes the rationale for exhorting us all to turn to Aborigines in order to heal ourselves and/or the planet. And it is this wider issue of disenchantment with elements of Western culture, together with the quest for the exotic, that is bringing an increasing number of foreign authors to Australia in order that they too can sup from what they see as the replenishing pool of Aboriginal spirituality.

A range of works is emerging from the experiences of these authors. The English novelist and biographer Monica Furlong arranged to stay in an Aboriginal community in the remote north west of Australia so that she could reconnect with the "sacredness of the natural world", recover the

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<sup>6</sup> For a discerning and critical overview of this practice see Andrew Lattas, "Nationalism, Art Intellectuals and Contemporary Australian Culture", *The Olive Pink Bulletin* 1.1 (1989) 23-29; Andrew Lattas, "Colonising the Other: Dreaming, Aboriginal Painting and White Man's Search for a Soul", *The Olive Pink Bulletin* 1.2 (1989) 23-29; Andrew Lattas, "Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordiality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness", *Social Analysis* 2.7 (1990) 50-69; Andrew Lattas, "Nationalism, Aesthetic Redemption and Aboriginality", *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2.3 (1991) 307-324; Andrew Lattas, "Primitivism, Nationalism and Individualism in Australian Popular Culture", in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, eds. Bain Attwood, and John Arnold (Clayton: National Centre for Australian Studies, 1992) 45-58. The arguments advancing elements and traits of Aboriginal cultural property — even Aboriginality itself — as solutions to a range of crises allegedly suffered by settler-Australians come from a range of perspectives. See for example, from a Jungian perspective, David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (North Blackburn: Harper Collins, 1995); from a conservative nationalist perspective, Anne Fairbairn, *Shadows of Our Dreaming: a Celebration of Early Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1983); from a Christian perspective Eugene Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation* (Alexandria: Millenium Books, 1995); and from the more personal perspective of attempting to find self-fulfilment (and the Aborigine within), see James Cowan, *Two Men Dreaming: a Memoir, a Journey* (Rose Bay: Brandl & Schlesinger, 1995). For a critical examination of Tacey's book see Mitchell Rolls, "The Jungian Quest for the Aborigine Within: a Close Reading of David Tacey's *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*", *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 25 (1998) 171-187; for a critical examination of the Christian appropriation of Aboriginal cultural property, see Mitchell Rolls, "The Black Path to Jesus: the Christian Appropriation of Aboriginal Culture", *Australian Studies* 13.2 (Winter 1998) 23-40.

perceptive qualities of childhood and shed the burdens of a harried and hurried lifestyle.<sup>7</sup> The American Lynn Andrews, a self-styled 'shamaness' and initiated member of something called the 'Sisterhood of the Shields' would have us believe that she travelled to Australia in a successful attempt to join the 'Dreamtime' so that she could further assist the earth's healing and return it to "a state of wholeness".<sup>8</sup> Anne Wilson Schaef, also from North America, includes Aboriginal 'wisdom' in her calendar book of banal daily reflections entitled *Native Wisdom for White Minds*.<sup>9</sup> The title is telling, for not only does Schaef meld the world's disparate autochthonous cultural expressions into a homogenous block of *Native Wisdom*, she takes it for granted that such 'wisdom' is available for the edification of *White Minds*. In this colonialist practice of 'what's yours belongs to us' the power privileges enshrined within the hegemonic relations between cultures are ignored. Perhaps the best known, and, partly because of this, the most egregious recent work of this ilk is Marlo Morgan's fantasised account of her claimed experiences crossing a desert landscape with "the tribe of Divine Oneness Real People". Her imagined pilgrimatic travails are detailed in *Mutant Message Down Under*.<sup>10</sup> And this list could go on.

Unlike settler-Australian accounts,<sup>11</sup> none of the above writers are at all interested in the issue of alienation from country. They are not seeking through Aborigines a way of acquiring a profoundly felt affiliation with place. Nor are they concerned with attempting (through appropriation) to Aboriginalise themselves in a flawed gesture towards reconciliation. Their turning to Aborigines is motivated by other factors. As discerned by bell hooks in a consideration of the allure of the Other, "Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture".<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that the use of ethnic or cultural 'seasoning' is a trivial matter of little consequence. Rather, the commodification of Indigenous and/or black cultures perpetuates colonial practices and authority. As Loretta Todd, a Metis film and video-maker argues:

<sup>7</sup> Monica Furlong, *Flight of the Kingfisher* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 1996). For a critical response to Furlong's book see Mitchell Rolls, "Cultural Colonisation: Monica Furlong and the Quest for Fulfilment", *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 11 (1998) 46-64.

<sup>8</sup> Lynn Andrews, *Crystal Woman: the Sisters of the Dreamtime* (New York: Warner Books, 1987) xv-xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Wilson Schaef, *Native Wisdom for White Minds: Daily Reflections Inspired by the Native Peoples of the World* (Milsons Point: Random House, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Marlo Morgan, *Mutant Message Down Under* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> See for example Tacey, Stockton; Cowan.

<sup>12</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) 21.

[b]y fetishizing us, we become mere objects of consumption, which initiates a production of desire: we become style, fashion, commodity; a source of script material, of choreographic inspiration, of literary realism. Having taken our land, attention is then turned to the imagination, the interior realm of our territories and powers.<sup>13</sup>

A book other than those mentioned above that illustrates hooks' and Todd's points is *Dreamkeepers* by North American author Harvey Arden.<sup>14</sup> Whilst in Australia's north-west to write a magazine article about that region, Arden, a former journalist turned 'private author' who for twenty-three years was a staff editor and writer for National Geographic, found his "hard-bitten journalist's soul smitten by [the] spiritual notion of the Dreamtime". This prompted his return a year later to search for a Dreaming of his own, and to "write a book about the experience".<sup>15</sup> The back-cover of the resulting book—*Dreamkeepers*—promises an "extraordinary spirit-journey into the minds, hearts and dreams of Australia's Aboriginal peoples". For a number of reasons the book does not fulfil these promises. Not the least of these being that from the outset of his journey it was apparent to Arden that Aborigines, in declaring rights to and control over the very property he sought, were going to frustrate his acquisitive intentions.<sup>16</sup> "Get your own Dreamtime. Don't take ours" is the demand issued by the first Aborigine he meets.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, Arden continued his journey. This is because besides needing material for the intended book, his travels in the Kimberley region appear to have been prompted by little more than the quest for exotic seasonings with which to salt his life. It is to a critical examination of *Dreamkeepers* that I now turn.

In addition to finding his own Dreaming, Arden had hoped to collect Dreaming stories, but this endeavour too was also repeatedly rebuffed by Aborigines who were obviously tired of having their culture exploited for little or no return,<sup>18</sup> or who were themselves authors of books containing Dreaming stories. Rather than telling Arden their stories, he was

<sup>13</sup> Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation", *Parallelogramme* 16.1 (Summer, 1990) 30.

<sup>14</sup> Harvey Arden, *Dreamkeepers: a Spirit-Journey into Aboriginal Australia* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 3, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 1-2, 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* 2, 7.

peremptorily told to buy their books instead.<sup>19</sup> For someone claiming that "perhaps nothing in Aboriginal culture has as much allure for the Western mind" as the Dreaming,<sup>20</sup> this was a major drawback. Thus it soon became obvious to Arden that he could not enter the Dreaming as he wished, and at best he could only "skirt the edges". "At times I would see the light from the Dreamtime the way you see light coming out from under the closed door of a brilliantly illuminated room. And yet, to me, the door was forever locked".<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, determined to write a book featuring Aborigines, Arden continues to garner his material through a willingness to be self-reproachfully insensitive and wilfully ignorant when it was in his interests to be so. Despite repeated requests by different Aborigines not to gather their myths and legends, he persists. Ignoring protest he also secures photographs that would serve to invoke a sense of his being in the presence of the spiritual realm he is so desirous of entering. This clamouring for what he is denied and for what appears beyond his reach results in Arden sloppily pouring *Dreamkeepers* into the mould of travel writing as a form of collection, where features of supposedly disappearing cultures<sup>22</sup> are preserved in print and photographic plate. The anomaly between presuming cultures are "dying"<sup>23</sup> and yet finding them sufficiently robust to rebuff unwelcome intrusion always seems to be missed, and the evidence that is amassed which points to their survival is portrayed as fading vestiges rather than features consistent with contemporary cultural expressions.

Arden's tour of the Kimberley was no minor excursion. With Mike, his Australian guide, an ex-Kimberley wildlife officer who had started his own 'safari business', he claims to have travelled many thousands of kilometres.<sup>24</sup> The distance covered, however, does not seem to be reflected in knowledge gained. Forced into predominantly relying upon naïve observations, Arden resorts to banalities, both his own and those issued by others, to characterise the Dreaming and whatever else he believes Aborigines have to offer. This is evident when he does not explain or challenge the comment of his guide that his time as a baseball pitcher with a Perth team was his "Dreamtime days".<sup>25</sup> This is not a minor point, for as Patrick Wolfe argues, "In Australia, the Dreamtime and its variants signify

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 16, 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 32-34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 32.

everything that was or remains Aboriginal".<sup>26</sup> Accepting such a trivialisation as unproblematic in a book detailing a quest for the Dreaming allows Aboriginal belief systems to slide into the imaginary world of unrealised opportunities and idle aspirations. The Dreaming loses its reality as a determining system within a culture and becomes instead a site of lost or past hopes and thwarted ambitions. In this way both the specificity and significance of the Dreaming complex is eroded. It becomes the shallow province of anyone's nostalgia and longings. To procure one's own Dreaming is simply to realise one's dream.

Another way in which the Dreaming is trivialised is apparent whenever a mountain, place or some other feature of visual significance is visited or seen. On the occasions when landscape provokes an emotional response in Arden he inevitably asks his non-Aboriginal guide if there is a Dreaming story associated with it.<sup>27</sup> But as Tony Swain points out:

[i]f Aboriginal religious affiliation with their land was founded on the affections there could be no rationale for their extensive body of esoteric lore. The secret is not how to feel for the land, but how to know its eternal mysteries.<sup>28</sup>

Not ever grasping this fundamental issue, Arden continues to link the Dreaming to what non-Aborigines find impressive. It is attached to places of scenic wonder, beauty and interest. A consequence of this is apparent when Arden finds a landscape visually transformed by a thunderstorm and passing showers. It becomes a "Dreamscape" and, referring to two conical shaped hills glimpsed through the storm, Arden states in question: "Bet those have a Dreamtime story about them".<sup>29</sup> The same scene viewed two days later through the dulling effects of heat haze is described as "unevocative". The loss of visual splendour is associated with the loss of its spiritual significance. The Dreaming becomes a transient phenomenon, its presence not dependent upon Aboriginal mythology and beliefs, but on non-Aboriginal aesthetics. "Strange how the Dreamtime comes and goes", Arden comments.<sup>30</sup> In this statement we find how glibly the cultural esotery

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up: the Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33.2 (1991) 199.

<sup>27</sup> Arden, 6, 44, 45, 117, 171.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Swain, "Dreaming, Whites and the Australian Landscape: Some Popular Misconceptions", *Journal of Religious History* 15.3 (1989) 348.

<sup>29</sup> Arden, 117.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 140.

of Aborigines is transformed into something else altogether by those engaged in the practice of cultural appropriation.

Arden's lack of understanding and misrepresentation of 'Dreamtime stories' and associated phenomena is clearly demonstrated in research conducted by the late anthropologist Eric Michaels in collaboration with the Warlpiri. Amongst other matters this research demonstrated the fact that scenic beauty or other sights that break the gaze across an 'empty' landscape are not necessarily spiritually significant to Aborigines. With no instruction in filming technique, the Warlpiri produced a documentary telling the story of the Coniston massacre, where in reprisal for the murder of the prospector Frederick Brooks in 1928 at least seventeen Aborigines were killed. Much of the resulting video is meaningless to a non-Aboriginal, perhaps even non-Warlpiri viewer. There are extended pans across apparently empty countryside. Instead of a naïve error by inexperienced cameramen, Michaels discovered that the 'empty' landscape shots were an integral part of the documentary. They were replete with the tracks of ancestral beings or other spiritually significant data.<sup>31</sup> Arden does not countenance such a reading of landscape. His interest was in making the Dreaming fit within his appreciation of the landscape, not in gaining an understanding of the landscape from an Aboriginal perspective.

Arden proclaims sensitivity to the fact that Indigenous peoples are not "quaint" or "primitive" "curiosities to be gawked at", but peoples who form part of the modern world. As such, he "wanted to relate to [Aborigines] as human being to human being, no more ... but *no less*".<sup>32</sup> The stress given to "no less" implies that Arden believes there is a universal standard in the way we should relate to one another, rather than such exchanges being culturally determined. Arden, however, appoints himself as the arbiter of communicative etiquette, for it is his needs as an acquisitive author that determine his expectations as to how Aborigines should behave. He expected to be able to observe Aborigines on various communities, learn about their culture and market a book based on this without any recompense being necessary. For example, at a community where he watches women artists at work, he is piqued at what he believes is an expectation that he will buy and churlish in his response. Describing himself as a "down-at-heels" author<sup>33</sup>, this must be seen in the context of someone who can afford a personal guide with vehicle for an extended research journey, he resents

<sup>31</sup> Eric Michaels, and F Jupurrula Kelly, "The Social Organisation of an Aboriginal Video Workplace", *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1984) 26-34.

<sup>32</sup> Arden, 3 - his emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 6, 126.

that it was not possible "just to stop by, say hello, and have a yarn".<sup>34</sup> Beyond the callousness of standing amidst the poverty of a remote Aboriginal community (the description leaves no doubt as to this)<sup>35</sup> and claiming impoverishment in one's defence at not purchasing artwork, this is duplicitous. Any 'yarn' that Arden manages to have finds its way into his book, and is therefore contributing to a product, which he intends to market. No conversation that Arden has takes on the qualities of the innocent non-exploitative chat he suggests he wants. And this highlights another key point. Despite proclaiming that sensitivity guides his relationships with Indigenous peoples, Arden simply assumes the 'right' to use the 'voice' of Aborigines in this way.<sup>36</sup>

Arden is also strangely dismissive, even contemptuous, of the art being viewed. Not surprisingly perhaps, due to his limited knowledge about Aboriginal art, it is first assessed aesthetically, and is described as "nice work, quite striking really".<sup>37</sup> What is surprising, given the stated nature of his project, is his lack of interest in extending his knowledge. Responding to the perpetual question of whether one painting represented a "Dreamtime landscape", the artist explained the symbolism and subject matter of the relevant story. Arden boorishly confesses that he "saw neither kangaroos nor men, only bright floating dabs and blotches of primary colour interlaced by wriggly black lines converging on a series of black and ochre circles".<sup>38</sup> But here was an opportunity to learn more about the Dreaming being presented to him. Tentative, however, perhaps because of an awareness of his own appropriative intentions, and fearful that an expected sale would be a corollary of any further interest shown, he refused that which he had come to Australia to find. The gathering of material for his book was not going to come at the expense of having to compensate those who could provide what he needed. He wanted access to the Dreaming on his terms or not at all, terms based on the principle that, beyond the expense of his non-Aboriginal guide, what material he gathered at source should be had for free. Nevertheless, although dismissive of the artwork and careful to avoid learning anything about it for fear of being snared in a transaction he was unwilling to make, he recognised worth in the scene. He felt compelled to

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 126.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid 126-129, 138.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion on the implications of dominant cultures assuming the right to use the 'voice' of non-dominant cultures see Janice Hladki, "Problematizing the Issue of Cultural Appropriation", *Alternate Routes* 11 (1994) 109; and Philip in Hladki, "Problematizing the Issue of Cultural Appropriation", 109.

<sup>37</sup> Arden, 126.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 127.



take photographs until, "nagged by increasing guilt, [I] put the lens cap back on my camera. Damn, here I was stealing Dreamtime stories again! Wouldn't I ever learn?"<sup>39</sup> But, as each similar exculpatory acknowledgment testifies, Arden does not have to learn because he already knows exactly what he is doing. This is his *modus operandi*. He first obtains what he needs for his book, then is self-reproachful as if this in some way expunges his arrogance and sense of guilt. Freely satisfying his interests and needs is the overriding priority.

A later incident further demonstrates this. Striking taciturnity almost everywhere he went, and wanting to see an Aborigine daubed with ochres, Arden shamelessly manipulates a very reluctant elder into a ceremonial dress-up. When reluctance was expressed - Arden was told it was only appropriate for the purposes of ceremony - and clearly indicated in an unwilling demeanour, Arden patronisingly suggests: "maybe you can just daub some paint on?"<sup>40</sup> He acknowledges that this was forced "desecration" and "obscene" behaviour yet he remained undeterred.<sup>41</sup> What happened to his introductory proclamation of respect, or the notion that Aborigines were not a "curiosit[y] to be gawked at", or that relations were to be conducted on an equitable basis of human being to human being?<sup>42</sup> Arden demonstrates he is prepared to breach even his own notions of etiquette when it is within his interests to do so. Furthermore, after stating in the prologue — as proof of his cross-cultural skills — what good relations he established with Native Americans when researching a previous book, he now admits to being reprimanded by an elder for asking him to similarly dress-up, a request that he admits making "often".<sup>43</sup> Obviously his claimed sensitivities to people of a different culture do not extend so far as according that culture respect when to do so would interfere with his objectives. Once again, self-castigation is his only apology, but that, apparently, is for the benefit of his readers, not the Aborigines he exploits. After the Aboriginal man had applied his ochres, "I took my bloody photographs, simultaneously shamed and shameless", he states.<sup>44</sup> But he had the photographs he so desperately wanted.

This wiry little man, so comically 'sparky' yesterday, so downcast and apologetic just a few moments ago, now looked

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 171.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 172.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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back at me through my camera lens with a ferocious dignity, nostrils quivering, eyes fearless and calm. He radiated power and serenity.<sup>45</sup>

In recognition of the marketing potential of such an image, a close-up of a man applying white pipeclay to his bearded face — that shows from middle of forehead to bottom of lower lip — features on the front cover of the book. Does this face belong to the man cajoled and bullied — “forced” is how Arden describes it<sup>46</sup> — into “dressing-up” despite his protestations? Irrespective of whether it does or not, the above incident demonstrates what *Dreamkeepers* exemplifies so well: the predatory nature of the constant search for expressions of ‘authenticity’. And this incident raises yet another point. Arden’s rejection of the authority of Aborigines to refuse that which he desires contributes to the further commodification of Aborigines and their cultures. As Todd argues in the context of appropriation concerning Native Americans:

[a]rtists who are committed to resisting dominant culture must acknowledge our authority, not merely our so-called ‘wisdom’. Failure to do so will only further a hegemonic aesthetic which will become commodified within consumer society.<sup>47</sup>

Arden’s method of gathering material and his subsequent book perpetuates such a hegemonic aesthetic.

The suspicion (if not contempt) that both Arden and Mike (his non-Aboriginal guide) held for Aborigines that were not welcoming or forthcoming, together with their lack of sensitivity to different interpretations of place, is evident in the closing chapter. Together the two men camped on the northern Kimberley coast. At dusk an old Aboriginal fisherman bearing his catch unexpectedly approached and repeatedly told them to leave. When informed that they had obtained permission from the “bossman” of the nearby mission to be there, the fisherman replied: “Not my bossman. Mebbe yours. He got no right, that fellow. Not your place here”.<sup>48</sup> He then tried to frighten them with warnings of crocodiles. Mike dismissively interpreted his warning and the demand to leave as an attempt

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid 171.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Todd, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Arden, 214.

to get a lift to the mission community one hour's drive away. However, after the fisherman had left Mike tells Arden the Dreaming story associated with their camp. It was in fact an important sacred site. "Right where we're sittin'", Mike reveals. "You're sittin' on a sacred site, mate".<sup>49</sup> There is no recognition that their presence could have been an act of desecration, or unease about this possible act of sacrilege. As in previous encounters, a potential source of the very information Arden came to Australia to find is suspected of ulterior motives. Instead of making a sale in this instance, it was to cadge a lift. But obviously Mike's explanation of the Dreaming story and sacred site was also more easily accommodated, for it necessitated no obligations or responsibilities. Arden and Mike were able to possess the story as well as camp where it terrestrially manifested. As with the land, the appropriation of Aboriginal cultural property is not to come at the cost of recognising their rights and interests. The knowledge gained did not even come at the modest price of being accorded respect. Aboriginal cultural property is to be taken for the benefit of the appropriator alone. Recompense or avoiding action that could prove deleterious to the maintenance of that property, is not part of the stratagem.

In his essay of 1969 discussing the odiousness of the tourist ventures delivering wealthy foreigners to the Sepik region of New Guinea so that they could "view savages on the hoof", the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter noted:

[t]his search for the primitive is surely one of the most remarkable features of our age. It's as if we feared we had carried too far our experiment in rationalism, but wouldn't admit it & so we called forth other cultures in exotic & disguised forms to administer all those experiences suppressed among us. But those we have summoned are generally ill-suited by tradition & temperament to play the role of alter ego for us. So we recast them accordingly, costuming them in the missing parts of our psyches & expecting them to satisfy our secret needs.<sup>50</sup>

Arden's journey to Australia in the quest for "a Dreaming of [his] own"<sup>51</sup> is but one example of how this 'search for the primitive' manifests today. His

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid 216.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund Carpenter, *Oh, What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me!* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973) 101-102.

<sup>51</sup> Arden, 5.

qualification that Aborigines are "here *now*, as much a part of this 'modern' world as anyone else on the planet",<sup>52</sup> does not connote an engagement with the diversity of contemporary Aboriginalities. Arden finds ways of anchoring all whom he meets or encounters to his understanding of 'traditional' heritage, an understanding seldom stretching beyond primitivist romanticism. The cover too, encloses the text in primitivist devices, from the photograph of the ochred face on the front to the blurbs on the back promising to provide "a vivid look at the oldest culture in the world" and to reveal to us the "spiritual core of this remote civilisation".

Unlike many who are urging us all to turn to Aborigines for some form of salvation or healing Arden was not trying to overcome any sense of alienation from either self or landscape, nor was he arguing that Aborigines held the key to Earth's survival. He was simply "here to warm [his] hands over the fading embers of another people's dying culture", and to write a form of salvage travel narrative based on this.<sup>53</sup> "Warming his hands" is a telling description for it infers an intended distance, a reluctance to thrust himself into the fire of Aboriginal cultures because of fears of being burnt by a demand for reciprocity. Hence whilst he had hoped to "Journey into the Dreamtime",<sup>54</sup> his ambition was thwarted. He had not found any points of access. The end result is that Aboriginal culture became for Arden simply the medium for yet another story, a product for the marketplace rendered through the frustrated ambitions of a non-Aboriginal author who was hoping to be able to write a book about how he had obtained his own Dreaming. Todd writes of appropriation that it is:

an extension of the concept of property and colonial conquest, [where] the artists do not value or respect cultural difference, but instead seek to own difference, and with this ownership to increase their worth. They become image barons, story conquistadors and merchants of the exotic.<sup>55</sup>

In this respect Arden's project exemplifies just one way in which the colonising process continues. Although Aboriginal resistance to Arden's grasping, and in some instances their refusal to divulge information, is

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid 3 - his emphasis.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid 217.

<sup>55</sup> Todd, 30; see also Geary Hobson, "The Rise of the White Shaman as a New Version of Cultural Imperialism", in *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*, ed. G Hobson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979) 101.

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evidence of growing systematic opposition to cultural colonisation where this aspiration is detected, *Dreamkeepers* provides an example of how, in various ways, exploitation in the pursuit of self-interest is still possible despite Aboriginal attempts to frustrate this.